

Talbot County Tourism Board
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, October 11, 2017
8:30 a.m.
215 Bay Street, Conference Room #1, Easton, MD 21601

I. Call to Order

Chairperson Judy Bixler called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m.

Board Members Present: Judy Bixler, Kelley Cox, Angela Eade, Ian Fleming, Tracy Johns, Dolores Jones, Harold Klinger, Laura Price, Jeff Schneider, Cassandra Vanhooser and Kimberly Weller

Board Members Absent: John Booth, Ben Simons

Recording Secretary: Candace Harris

II. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the September meeting were presented. Harold Klinger moved that the minutes be accepted as written. Dolores Jones seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

III. Old Business

Short Term Rentals: Ms. Vanhooser informed the Board that the letter to the County Council regarding recommendations for Short-Term Rentals has been submitted. She also informed them that the people against short-term rentals people have been very vocal.

Angela Eade reported that her homeowner's are getting a letter together to submit in support of short-term rentals, and Jim Campbell is having his homeowners submit a letter as well. Angela also feels that restaurants and shops should draft letters. Laura Price stated that the Council had already received about 15 letters. A consultant will make recommendations to the staff at Planning and Zoning, who will then submit suggested changes to the County Council.

Ms. Vanhooser feels it is important to keep having these discussions during the Board meetings. Mrs. Price agreed and said that she would like to have discussions with the Board (maybe not at every meeting) until the situation has been resolved. Ms. Vanhooser thanked everyone and also asked the Board to weigh in with the County Council as they feel comfortable.

Frederick Douglass 200th Birthday Celebration: Ms. Vanhooser reported that she is still working with the Frederick Douglass 200th Birthday Celebration committee to have year-long events for the celebration. She also reported that the Department of Economic Development and Tourism has submitted a small grant to transition the Frederick Douglass Driving Tour into a web-based tour so people can access it from their cell phones. We hope to have this done by February 14, 2018. She will keep you informed of what events that are being planned. There is a lot of interest from journalists. Judy Bixler stated that the Maryland Office of Tourism Development is also working on promoting the events.

Nace Hopkins 150th Celebration: Ms. Vanhooser reported that the Nace Hopkins 150 Emancipation Day Parade and Celebration is the first weekend in November. She reported that the Lieutenant Governor has been invited to attend. The Emancipation Quilt will also be on display during the celebration. She also reported that she is working with Scott's United Methodist Church and the town of Trappe to get interpretive signs for the Nace Hopkins Park because it is right on the edge of the Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway. The church is working on a grant to get this done.

Hotel Position: Jeff Schneider asked about the hotel position. Ms. Vanhooser stated that she has no update yet.

IV. New Business

Final FY17 Tourism Numbers: Ms. Vanhooser passed out the final 12 month numbers for FY17. She reported that Talbot County is down as a total by 1.5% which she is not alarmed because of Harbortowne being closed. The general merchandise sales are also down because of the Amazon factor.

The second sheet she distributed contained all of the numbers for every county. She wanted to point out that we collect more accommodations tax than Wicomico County, and they have three times as many rooms than we do. Ms. Vanhooser stated that our grant last year was \$89,817 and the 1.5% drop will cause us to have a \$31,000 drop in our state grant. This is because the grant is based on growth and performance.

Mr. Schneider commented that weddings were down in 2017. Ms. Jones agreed. Ms. Vanhooser thinks it could be a lag from the election cycle and the numbers should rebound because weddings are booked in advance. Mr. Klinger asked how do we make sure the council doesn't look at the numbers and decide in the next budget period to reduce your budget for the county. Ms. Price stated that she doesn't think it will be reduced, but also that it would not be raised by \$30,000 either. Mrs. Bixler said we have to be careful and not let the County diminish the amount that they are giving us because the formula is based on local investment. In the long run we will not be able to build the grant back up again if the County doesn't fund us at the same level.

Ms. Vanhooser reported that growth this year was Baltimore City, Ocean City, and Prince George's County. They have gigantic hotels over there, and they are spending an enormous amount of money on advertising which impacts us.

V. Comments:

Mrs. Price stated that the Council approved the deal with the bank for an ATM on Tilghman Island.

VI. Town Reports

Representatives from each of the towns reported on news and events taking place in their jurisdictions.

VII. Next Board Meeting

The Maryland Travel and Tourism Summit coincides with the next regularly scheduled meeting. The next board meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 15, 2017, at 8:30 a.m.

X. Adjournment

Ms. Bixler thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. Harold Klinger motioned for adjournment and Jeff Schneider seconded. The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:29 a.m.